

1999

God and Man at SUNY Brockport

Colin Maxwell

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/student_archpapers

Repository Citation

Maxwell, Colin, "God and Man at SUNY Brockport" (1999). *Papers on the History of the College at Brockport*. 50.
https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/student_archpapers/50

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College Archives at Digital Commons @Brockport. It has been accepted for inclusion in Papers on the History of the College at Brockport by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @Brockport. For more information, please contact kmyers@brockport.edu.

God and Man at SUNY/Brockport

By

Colin Maxwell
477 Pebbleview Dr.
Rochester, NY, 14612

History 691

May 21, 1999

In the half-century since the State University of New York system was created, the campus of SUNY/Brockport has undergone significant and profound changes. From a small teacher's college, a high-quality comprehensive liberal arts institution has risen to meet the needs of over 8,600 undergraduate and graduate students. There are a variety of ways to view these changes, but the most interesting way is to view how the religious beliefs of the students have changed. The manner in which people worship or explore relationships with God is one of the most effective indicators of how a society or a community changes over time. From the moment of the creation of the SUNY system, the presence of religious organizations, sects, and clubs provided a ready-made stage for students and faculty to discuss, debate, and battle over issues such as religious and social identity, politics, and civil rights. In addition, the role of the religious clubs within the community of SUNY/Brockport is a good indicator of how the college is evolving as a community. Brockport has evolved into a commuter institution without any overt religious presence, and the question is, has this always been the case? What role did religion play in the life of the average student when SUNY/Brockport was created in 1948? This paper is an attempt to provide some explanation of how religion played an active role in the formative years of SUNY/Brockport, and also how mainstream Protestant sects were unable to adapt to the changes. Four themes emerged from my research:

1. Religion as identity vs. ecumenism.
2. Religion for personal exploration vs. socially conscious religion
3. Protestant decline, Jewish increase, and Catholic strength and dominance
4. Decline and disappearance of religious clubs on campus

The first of these themes, the struggle between maintaining religious identity while fostering a spirit of ecumenism, was the dominant theme of religion at SUNY/Brockport during the first twenty years of its existence. The other three themes began to emerge in the 1960s as a more diverse student body began to actively question the values of a society many viewed as fundamentally flawed. The results of this intense self-examination had far-reaching consequences for all facets of life, including religion, on campus.

In 1948, the new SUNY/Brockport Campus had two religious clubs on its campus, the Newman Club and the Student Christian Fellowship (SCF). Newman traces its origins back to November 6, 1940, when

the Josephine Mannix and Dr. Straemeyer presided over the first meeting. At the time, Brockport was still referred to as the Brockport Normal School, but the Catholic population had grown to such an extent the creation of a Newman club was deemed possible. The two faculty members felt a strong responsibility to their Catholic students to give them an environment to socialize and practice their faith outside of church. The response was strong with over 75% of the Catholic students participating in a pre-Lenten party in the spring of 1941. (1)

The role of Catholics on campus prior to the creation of SUNY had changed considerably, along with the roles of other groups. According to John Kutolowski, Catholics had formed a large percentage of the students at the old Brockport Normal School, and the ethnic base of the student body broadened considerably in the years prior to the creation of the Newman club in 1940. This may have been in large part due to economic necessity, since jobs were scarce unless one had the proper qualifications. What is more difficult to explain is the fact that Brockport was becoming a more socially diverse campus, with an increase in Slavic, Italian, and Jewish names among entering students (2). No data at this time points to any specific change, beyond the theory that this was part of a trend away from outright assimilation and towards tolerance of ethnic and religious minorities.

Kutolowski points towards one significant, if not very scientific, piece of information concerning religious attitudes on campus. In 1935, an honors student named Eric Seim conducted a survey as part of a Sociology assignment on religious beliefs on campus. His findings, which *The Stylus* published in February of 1936, indicated a high level of concern for religion among the students at Brockport, with roughly 90% of the 100 students surveyed indicating some affiliation with a sect or denomination. Of these 90 students who felt a strong religious identification, 70 felt that faith had them attend the churches in town. Of the students who felt a strong religious identification, Seim found that Catholics were more inclined to stay with their church, possibly due to the prevailing anti-Catholic views of the period.

The role of Protestants is more difficult to trace, since few records aside from back issues of *The Stylus* still exist. None of the Protestant student groups of past years, such as the Canterbury Club, Lutheran Student Club, the Wesley Foundation, Student Christian Fellowship or others have survived, but they left a mark on the campus that was wholly unanticipated. For a period of time following the creation of SUNY, student religious clubs were formed to foster a sense of identity within the college that was separate from

the town of Brockport. A notice in *The Stylus* that appeared on October 14, 1947 for a meeting between the Student Christian Fellowship and the Newman Club with local clergy shows a degree of cooperation emerging between denominations that was unusual for its time. However, it is important to note that one of the dominant themes for discussion for all the religious clubs revolved around the issue of maintaining identity. This issue not only concerned Catholic and Jewish students, but Protestants as well. There were regular discussions on the desirability of intermarriage, and the language of these announcements suggests definite distinctions between various Protestant sects. This shows that various sects were struggling to retain their unique characteristics while working towards common goals with other sects and faiths.

Discussions in meetings during this period range from the mundane to the extraordinary: the November 20th, 1947 *Stylus* dealt with the Catholic Church's position on evolution, what constituted Catholic marriage duties, and the importance of Confession. While the discussion was not covered beyond a description of "intense", it showed the religious clubs were places where substantive issues were being discussed on campus. Social activism was also taking root, as when an editorial piece by Eugene Michaels appeared in *The Stylus* dealt with racial prejudice. He sharply attacked the institutionalized bigotry in American education, particularly in the state of Mississippi. Michaels exhorted students to care, since "...we are the future teachers of America "... This issue not only concerns education, but it hits unemployment, right to vote, medical aid, and even common courtesy... We won't ignore it, but will we do anything about it?"(3) This cry for social justice predated the Civil Rights Era by a decade and showed some students viewed serious social issues through the prism of education. The injection of the moral element into this discussion shows a growing spirit of social activism on campus, possibly a result of World War Two bringing their experiences in the wider world to SUNY/Brockport. Whatever the cause, the result of this editorial is clear: social issues were being discussed on this campus earlier than is generally believed.

In 1948, the Student Christian Fellowship released an announcement in *The Stylus* declaring membership to be open to all, regardless of race, creed, or denomination. Wayne Dedman, author of *Cherishing This Heritage*, currently the only complete history of SUNY/Brockport, advised this non-denominational Christian organization, which arranged talks on such topics as "College as a preparation for Marriage". They were actively involved in what were described as missionary efforts, and also had a

social ministry that gathered food for needy local families. The January 14, 1949 issue of *The Stylus* covered a meeting by SCF that dealt with several hot button issues. These issues included mixed marriages, the Protestant viewpoint of Birth Control as given by a Japanese-American minister and the value of Christianity in Teaching, as well as the usual announcements about movies and social events. (4) A year later, Mrs. Backus of the local chapter of Planned Parenthood and the Reverend Daugherty of St. Luke's Episcopal led a discussion on Birth Control sponsored by the SCF. This was followed by a debate over the issue of social drinking (This announcement was made following St. Patrick's Day; is this a coincidence?). Charles Emerson Boddie, a Black minister and graduate of Colgate-Rochester Divinity School gave a talk on October 6, 1949 entitled " All These People ", which focussed on racial cooperation and understanding. During the same week, the Campus RoundTable scheduled a discussion entitled " Are Our Moral Standards Deteriorating? "(5): this unusually serious topic shows the students were considering more serious topics than splash parties and athletics scores, which dominated the coverage in the paper at this time.

In 1949, student interest shifted towards the Communist takeover of China. Newman, SCF and Canterbury presented a film entitled " My Name is Han ", described in *The Stylus*, November 28th, 1949: " This film presents a new picture of post-war China that has far-reaching international implications. It's a type of film that tells a new kind of story. It's not only dramatic, but a living document of an inspiring new development in world Christianity with which every informed Christian should be acquainted."(6) While there is no further description of the film, clearly the issue is religious freedom and the threat Christians felt from Communism.

Significantly, there is a detailed description of Chanukah during this period. Under the announcement " Hebrews Hold Holy Holiday ", there was a brief description of the Festival of Light. What is also of great significance is a discussion by a Jewish group known as the IZFA on the subject of intermarriage, as well as a lecture by Reverend John Paul Jones in 1950 on his trip to Israel, where he met with David Ben-Gurion and other Israeli leaders. In 1952 the Kinneret Club, formerly known as the Intercollegiate Zionist Organization, appeared on campus and declared their meetings open to people of all faiths (7). Later that spring Kinneret scheduled a latke party, presumably an effort to offset the spaghetti dinners the Newman Club had been setting for years.

Two seemingly contradictory forces were at work in the religious life of SUNY/Brockport, sectarian identity and ecumenism. Inter-marriage became a staple discussion topic for the religious clubs during this period. On October 24, 1952, a bulletin appeared announcing SCF's sponsorship of this topic: "The panel, composed of students, will consider the various problems encountered when members of various races & religions marry." (8) There is no record of the topics discussed at this forum, but clearly real concerns regarding religious identity were exhibited by the various sects and by the students. The SCF turned its attention to the subject once again in November of 1954. Newman held similar discussions in November of 1952 and 1955, which *The Stylus* described as "spirited" (9). There appears to be a definite agenda, almost a curriculum, for each club. The agenda is twofold, and seemingly contradictory: to be part of the intellectual climate of a college, participating in give-and-take, while remaining a separate body intent on preserving the unique character of its religion or sect. An enormous amount of cooperation was inevitable on a small campus, but each appears to have attempted to meet the needs of its members on its own as much as possible. SCF sponsored food drives and put on entertainment for migrant workers, but was also more interested in the moral issues of marriage and social obligations more than the other clubs. Canterbury took an international tack, with a drive in March of 1956 for donations to a university in Hokkaido (10). Wesley, the Methodist Student Group, sponsored a panel discussion on Study-Abroad programs, while Newman held a talk entitled simply, "What is Religion?". A talk and demonstration held by Reverend Atwell on March 18, 1955 on the significance of the Mass demonstrated the symbolism of each vestment (11). On April 29, 1955 the Christian Science Club was formed, and the following fall Kinneret announced its intention of becoming part of the nationwide Hillel organization, although this merger did not take place for several years. The reasons for this delay are unclear, and Kinneret did not release any information to *The Stylus* explaining the delay. The various clubs were sending significant delegations to conferences, and announcements in *The Stylus* had clearly progressed beyond splash parties, bakes sales, and spaghetti dinners.

Amidst this repeated emphasis on sectarian identity, the clubs frequently cooperated and assisted one another; for example, Reverend Crump of St. Luke's Episcopal lent Kinneret the Parish House for a Passover Seder in February of 1954 (12). There is no direct information in *The Stylus* that explicitly explains this, but references to Internationalism are a possible explanation. World Federalism was an

important enough topic for SCF to invite a speaker to explain how it fit into Christian Ideology. Kinneret sponsored a talk entitled "Jews and Communism " in February of 1953 that described the Prague Trials and the arrests of American Communists.

In the late 1950's mention of religion in *The Stylus* becomes sporadic for a number of reasons. There were no great social issues with which to connect, and the period of internationalism that followed World War Two had been replaced by an acceptance of the Cold War. A series of beats and columns appeared in the paper, and mention of religion is limited to announcements of social events and the annual election of officers. This lack of coverage may simply be due to editorial policies at the paper, although there is no easy way to confirm this. It is important to note this lack of coverage went on for a period of three to four years, ending as the presidential race of 1960 approached.

As the 1960's dawned, new issues begin to take center stage. The March 18, 1960 issue of *The Stylus* analyzed a Campus Roundtable discussion on the nature of Free Love in-depth. This discussion, which focussed on what the organizers regarded as the necessity of having premarital sexual experience in order to increase the probability of a marriage succeeding, was a marked departure from other discussions previously held on campus. It represented the first recorded debate dealing with sex before marriage that encouraged pre-marital relations, thus undermining more traditional views espoused by the religious clubs. Groups such as the Baptist Student Movement continued to hold talks on preparation for marriage, but the fact that Brockport was even holding discussions on changing attitudes towards premarital sex is an indication of how much Brockport was changing. In the same issue of *The Stylus* there is an article about a protest at SUNY Fredonia in support of Martin Luther King and desegregation. Issues of morality, the family and religious beliefs were colliding, and campuses were being increasingly drawn into these divisive issues.

Amid this impending storm of social unrest, the religious clubs continued to evolve. Kinneret Club members held Passover services with the University of Rochester's Hillel Club, adding the latest chapter in the Kinneret/Hillel saga. Campus Roundtable sponsored a talk on the tenets of the Greek Orthodox Church, the first mention in SUNY/Brockport history. Newman members participated in a variety of activities, ranging from catechetical instruction and visiting the sick to assisting with the local census taking. Rabbi Abram Karp of Temple Beth-El delivered a talk on UN Assembly Day in October of 1960

entitled "Everything in the world is our responsibility" (13). The resurgence of social issues in 1960 that stands in stark contrast to the complacency of the late 50s, when social issues disappeared from the pages of *The Stylus* and even announcements for social gatherings faded off the radar. The election of 1960 produced a fertile climate for discussion of new issues. The emphasis of the talks given by the religious organizations shifted towards social issues and away from sectarian identity. Interestingly, no articles or announcements dealing with the issue of JFK's Catholicism in 1960 appeared, at least on this campus. A good indication of this shift is a brief excerpt of an address to the Newman Club by Sister Jamesetta, a nun with the Sisters of St. Joseph's in Rochester. She urged teachers "...whether they be lay or religious, to be alert...to changes in the world." (14) Perhaps in response, Newman sponsored discussions entitled "The Philosophy of Catholic Education), presumably an outgrowth of the Vatican II Council.

As the 1960s began, religious organizations continued to have a strong presence at Brockport. Over 500 attended a Mass held at Brockport in September of 1961. Other groups such as the Campus Christian Association began holding meetings and coffeehouses with topics like "The Peace Corps", "The Skeptics Coffee Hour", and "The Situation in the Middle East". There also were experiments with the form of worship services: The Campus Christian Association held a "Jazz Liturgy" during a retreat at Silver Lake, New York (16). John Wesley's order of Morning Worship had been set to Jazz by a University of Texas Music professor, and a discussion of the use of Jazz for religious purposes was scheduled to follow. It is important to note this event was open to Protestants only, but this type of innovation had not been seen at Brockport prior to this. Kinneret and the growing Jewish population at Brockport brought speakers like Dr. Emmanuel Ze'V Sufott, the First Secretary of the Israeli Embassy, who addressed "...a mass audience of 400" in February of 1962 on the history and problems of modern Israel. Al Rissen, *The Stylus* reporter concluded that, "The story of the Jew is a history of creative thought and courageous deeds. It is the great metamorphosis of ancient Biblical thought into one of the most modern social economic structures of our time. This is the story of the Jew." (17)

Another concern of the times is the concern over a nuclear war. The Campus Christian Association held a program on Civil Defense entitled "Civil Defense-Necessity or Nonsense?", led by Reverend Bruce Rahtgen, who had led a previous discussion on fallout shelters for the Campus Roundtable. The following questions were asked at the meeting, recorded by *The Stylus* (18):

with creating a civil society. Brockport was still primarily focussed on the training of teachers, so the issues of education and social equality, while hardly new, were being addressed with a renewed intensity.

Discussion about activist groups was not confined to those on the Left: at a Campus Christian Association open meeting on November 1, 1963, Dr. Edward Cain reviewed two chapters of his book They'd Rather Be Right, an examination of far-right wing youth groups and what *The Stylus* describes as "splinter church groups". Anti-communism is the apparent link between them, but racism is also cited as a strong force binding them together. The article cited their ability to force international organizations to withdraw from some campuses.

Right-wing groups also made appearances on the campus. Shortly after the assassination of President Kennedy, the local head of the John Birch Society proclaimed the murder of JFK was the work of a Communist conspiracy. The Birchers always claimed, "The continued co-existence of Communism and a Christian-style civilization on one planet is impossible."⁽²¹⁾ This accusation, combined with the statement of principle by the John Birch Society shows the use of religion by all facets of society to morally justify their beliefs. In March of 1962, Al Rissin described the Birchers and their sympathizers as the nucleus of a far-right, third political party in the United States. While deriding their methods and ridiculing their statements (which included the assertion that Dwight Eisenhower was a "...dedicated and conscious agent of the Communist Party"), Rissin concluded they were trying to connect with traditional nativist elements within American society ⁽²²⁾.

On a mundane level, Newman planned for summer school at R.P.I. where issues such as Contemporary Atheism and God's Existence, Councils and THE Council, and Christian Goals and their Motivating Forces were listed as topics ⁽²³⁾. In the fall Newman began classes on Christian Marriage and Considerations of Contemporary Theology.⁽²⁴⁾ C.C.A. began the year with a talk entitled simply Religion on Campus.

1962 closed with an intense debate between Father Daly of Newman and Dr. Eric Steele following a Campus Roundtable discussion entitled The Bible as Literature. Father Daly, who had not attended the meeting, criticized Dr. Steele on some of the points Steele raised during the discussion. Steele responded in *The Stylus* a week later with a blistering attack on what he viewed as Daly's interference in an intellectual debate in order to preserve the faith of Roman Catholics on Campus:

" Now I'm sure I'd be happy to welcome Father Daly as a friend as I would any other man of friendly intentions. But when I discover I'm to be blessed with a mentor as well, the prospect suddenly becomes less pleasing. Surely the implication that Father Daly will have to be constantly checking the temperature of the college bathwater to be sure it is just right for students nurtured in the Catholic faith, is one many non-Roman Catholics (and many Roman Catholics as well) will find ludicrous or infuriating-according to their temperament! "(25)

This exchange marked the first time a SUNY/Brockport professor attacked a religious group on campus. Dr. Steele later spoke to C.C.A. on a discussion entitled Is There a God?, so this went beyond a mere dislike of Catholicism. Steel, a French professor and political and religious freedom advocate, was awarded the Religious Liberty Award by the New York State Americans United for Separation of Church and State in November of 1972. He was given the award for his efforts to support non-sectarian education in the state, and was a vigorous foe of public funding for religious institutions, particularly Catholic schools. He explained his reasons by citing the problems of Ireland as an example of religion and the state being intertwined. (26)

Newman began the 1963-64 school year by announcing it would be referred to as the Newman Foundation, and the Oratory would open to the entire college community as a meeting hall. An Episcopalian Minister, Father Van Duyne, was assigned to Brockport as a chaplain. In 1964 there is an announcement in *The Stylus* for a talk being given at the Protestant Student Center. While in and of itself this announcement is innocuous, this is the first mention appearing in *The Stylus* for a Protestant gathering spot. The Center was located at 61 Perry Street, and had speakers and social events for the Protestant community on campus, presumably in response to Newman Oratory. (27)

The emergence of Phi Sigma Epsilon, a Philosophy club, in May of 1964 marks a change in the climate of the college. Organized in an effort to encourage discussion and debate of philosophical issues, ideas, and problems, it devotes its first discussion to existentialism (28).. This is no longer an institution devoted to churning out teachers, but an institution taking its first, tentative steps towards becoming a comprehensive liberal arts college with a culture devoted to questioning, analyzing, and criticizing the world outside of the college and Education. The fact that students are forming a club devoted to the study

of philosophies and ideas that challenge mainstream views on existence and belief is a clear signal that some students are prepared to question their core beliefs. Brockport was beginning to explore the realm of ethics and personal beliefs. Canterbury reflected this change when it sponsored a talk entitled "From Death to Existentialism". Dr. Victor Frankel, M.D., spoke on concerns with existentialism and psychiatry (29). While the substance of the talks was not reported, it is clear there is a curiosity about the nature of existence that traditional faith is beginning to have difficulty explaining. The Wesley Foundation also began a series of discussions entitled "The Crisis of the World and the Word of God". One of the topics was called "Kosmos in Krisis", presumably a discussion of how to reconcile Protestant Christian beliefs with new discoveries in science (30).

1964 saw Civil Rights become constant front-page news in *The Stylus*. Thus, when Canterbury held a discussion on interfaith marriage, it now distinguished between interfaith and interracial marriage, whereas before it was simply "intermarriage". This distinction is important, since it is clear sectarian boundaries are becoming less important, at least among Christian sects.

Dr. Lawrence Petry of Cornell led a purely scientific discussion of evolution, arguing man acts on assumptions he does not know are true: for example, one of these assumptions is that man has reached a point where he understands his place in the universe (31). The discussion of the philosophical implications of man's place in the universe was certainly not unknown at Brockport, but this is the first time the college had sanctioned a non-religious figure to come to the college to argue a point of view many clergy might have objected to. It is another sign the college was changing, the students were changing, and the place of religion in society, both inside and outside the college was changing. In 1966, the Philosophy Department appointed Joseph Gilbert to their staff. Gilbert had previously taught the theory of knowledge, ethics and religion at NYU and Brooklyn College. The announcement of his appointment paid particular attention to his efforts to teach the philosophy of Religion for the semester (32). Psychology and Religion were the basis for a series of talks sponsored by the Crypt Coffee House with titles like The Meaning of Religious Intention, The Roots of Religion, and Religion and the Growing Mind, and placed a heavy emphasis on Jung, Allport and Fromm (33). Boundaries were no longer as clearly defined as they had been only a few years before, and Brockport struggled to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body.

A radical transformation of the religious clubs away from their traditional roles, coupled with an increased interest in what could be described as experiential or charismatic faiths, resulted in religion and faith being explored in ways the founders of Newman, Wesley and others could not have imagined. Newman, along with the other campus ministries, sponsored a dinner seminar in 1965 entitled "Religion and ____". The purpose was to discover "...whether there is a significant relationship between religion and various issues, problems and phenomena" (34) present in society in 1965. The topics included race, urbanization, the Playboy Philosophy, among other less controversial topics. This is perhaps the high-water mark for the religious clubs on campus, since the years that followed showed a falling away from the traditional religious organizations. The "Religion and ____" series began with "Religion and Ivanhoe Donaldson", a film that depicted the experiences of a civil rights worker who led voter registration drives in Alabama, Virginia and Mississippi in 1963. Ernst Weiner, a representative from the United Council of Churches who led seminars on urbanization and civil rights, led a discussion on the topic of civil rights.

The conflict between self-exploration and social conscience is first played out in 1965. Wesley sponsored a talk by Mr. Frank Bartok on his summer teaching experience in Africa through Operation Crossroads Africa, as well as discussions of Nazi war guilt and an analysis of the movie "Almost Neighbors" depicting one man's attempts to discover himself (35). This focus on self continued in a decidedly non-traditional talk, led by Dr. John Crandall and the Baptist Reverend Mr. Deichler, entitled "Religion and the Playboy Philosophy", analyzing Hugh Hefner's contention that much of the guilt and illness in our society resulted from sexual repression. According to *The Stylus*, Hefner was not advocating a hedonistic lifestyle, but rather "... a balance of work and play"(36). We see a mainstream Protestant organization sponsor a talk by an Operation crossroads volunteer, and then show a film focussing on one man's attempt to discover himself.

During the early to mid 1960s, Newman underwent a radical, and at times, painful transformation. Newman had acquired property on which to build a Newman Foundation center to function as a Catholic student parish. Unfortunately, the State of New York decided to take the land from the foundation for a construction project. Fortunately, through the generosity of Dr. and Mrs. Henry Johantgen, Newman found a new site to build the present Newman Oratory. On April 1, 1964 Newman published an open letter for all Catholic students to take home. The letter was an appeal to the students to help Newman pay off its

considerable debt. The new Oratory opened in the fall of 1966 to considerable fanfare, with the promise to continue to have the Newman facilities open to the entire college community.

In 1967, Brockport, as host to the International Philosophy Year, brought leaders in the field to Brockport for lectures and discussions. The topics included the Philosophy of Education, Religion, Practice, Science, Ethics, Mind, Belief, Aesthetics, Language and Logic, History, Metaphysics, Social Science, Communications and the Arts, and Human Rights. This period represents another high-water mark in attempts to deal with questions of belief, existence, and religion at Brockport. It also represented one of the last times students used the clubs on campus to discuss religious, moral, or philosophical issues. Increasingly students turned to the editorial pages of *The Stylus*, as well as more direct forms of protest to air concerns about moral and ethical issues. The International Philosophy Year was regarded by many students as a squandered opportunity for Brockport to achieve respectability in academic circles. All the discussions dealt with substantive topics, such as "Do we know the world through Science?" and "Theory meets Experience". The fact a forum such as the International Philosophy Year could even be staged at Brockport indicates a level of interest not present even five years before (37).

1967 also saw intense ecumenical activity by the various campus ministries, with Protestant groups combining resources in a desperate effort to stay afloat. There was a sharp drop in activity by the various Protestant groups; perhaps due to declining attendance Wesley took over the old Protestant Student Center at 61 Perry Street. Canterbury and other groups no longer appear in *The Stylus*, and it is unclear as to whether they had completely disappeared or if they no longer had strong leaders. Father Daly of Newman speaks at Wesley-Ecumenical Organization, delivering a talk entitled "How My Views Have Changed During the Past Ten Years." This marked the first time a chaplain publicly announced a change in views and outlook to the campus community. While part of this is undoubtedly due to the changes brought about by Vatican II, it also reflects the dramatic way students at Brockport changed over the previous ten years. Ecumenism was alive and well, the campus was growing and diversifying, bringing changes in both the outlooks of the students, faculty, and the chaplains assigned to the campus by the various denominations.

One important indicator of this change in outlook was the emergence of the Bahai Club in 1968, marking the formal entrance of the first distinctly non-western religion on campus. A description of the Bahai appeared in *The Stylus* on November 1, 1968. Entitled What's Bahai?, the article gave a brief

description of the origins of the faith in 19th century Persia, as well as a brief comparison between Christianity, Judaism, Islam and numerous polytheistic faiths.

The issues of personal morality and values took on added significance during the middle to late 60s when the Debate Club announced an audience debate on the following resolution, " Private morality is no concern of the Law: yes or no." Forums dealing with Birth Control are in demand, and articles in *The Stylus* begin offering information about local groups opposed to the draft. Rochester Resistance, a coalition of groups ranging from the Rochester Sisters of Mercy to local chapters of the SDS, began running information articles on issues including the turning in of draft cards. One article is significantly titled "Resistance-Conscience". (38) That same issue Edward Schrader published a short article entitled "Vietnam-A Case of Cultural Values", which called for an objective analysis of American involvement in Vietnam. Schrader argued that US involvement was motivated by a belief in the total superiority of American ideals over other systems. According to Schrader, the paradox created by forcefully imposing American democracy on a society unwilling to accept it should cause backers of the war to pause in their support of the South Vietnamese. (39)

1968 marked the beginning of a period of intense student activism at Brockport. One of the first and most controversial of the student radical leaders, James Howard Kunstler, wrote an analysis of what he perceived to be the changing morals in American society. Entitled "The People vs. the Pigs", Kuntsler charged that police now occupied the role once reserved for the clergy, that of defending public morals. He describes the clergy as intolerant defenders of law who decided who constituted a threat to society and who did not. In Kuntsler's view, the State replaced the Church and the police were now meting out justice to those who violated the law. (40) Kuntsler uses the Democratic Convention in Chicago to illustrate his point. Arguably the most interesting event in 1968 was the October visit by Timothy Leary to Brockport. Debating Dr. Sidney Cohen in Hartwell Gym on the subject of LSD, Leary argued LSD brings one closer to God by expanding one's consciousness, and contended there was no evidence LSD was harmful. Steven Silverman, writing for *The Stylus*, said the following: "Leary wants people to explore themselves as fully as possible and in doing this they should use LSD which will in effect widen the mind and cause the consciousness to expand. Only in doing this, he feels, will the individual find himself and God. His parting advice to the people was ' do your thing the best way you know how.'"(41) Dr. Cohen advocated life was

more meaningful when lived in reality. The interesting part about this report is the extraordinary attention on Leary, with his inward focus, and the virtual absence of organized, mainstream religion at this point. Reaction to Leary's visit was decidedly negative: a letter by John Adriance to the editors of *The Stylus* compared Leary's approach of using LSD to broaden the mind to throwing twenty sticks of dynamite into a well-structured building. Entitled A Hollow Christ, Adriance stated the result of this broadening would indeed open one's consciousness, but the architecture of the mind itself would be rendered useless. Adriance warned of the creation of a religion with, "...a false god, i.e., a golden calf named LSD." (42)

Not all the religious clubs were left-leaning: the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship sponsored a talk by Paul Bertolino of the Conservative Christian Congregational Churches of New England and Canada entitled "Christ, Sex, and the Playboy Philosophy". The talk begins with "Did you know that Hugh Hefner really doesn't like sex? You didn't?" (43) This stands in sharp contrast to the discussion held in 1965 on the Playboy Philosophy, which contended Hefner was only advocating a balance of work and play.

The emphasis on social justice left the religious clubs and entered the campus community as a whole, resulting in the disappearance of many of the mainstream sects. They merged into the Protestant ecumenical organizations or have been transformed into institutions like Hillel and Newman. Newman continued on with its work hosting a forum on the moral issues in the 1968 presidential race, such as the Draft, the Kerner report on Racism, the Military-Industrial Complex, as well as other related issues (44). As 1968 drew to a close, it became clear that while moral and philosophical issues were being discussed and argued at a fever pitch, the original forums for these discussions were abandoned in favor of more confrontational settings. In 1969, most of the Protestant organizations were organized under the auspices of the United Protestant Ministries, while Newman had the advantage of having, at least on paper, every Catholic being a member of their parish.

Another moral issue was the question of whether to provide contraceptives to students through the Campus clinic. In a huge headline, the October 8, 1969 issue of *The Stylus* announced "Birth Control Denied", citing a state policy barring distribution of contraceptives and denying college students information about obtaining contraceptives or information on sexually transmitted diseases. The doctors at the clinic were willing to direct women to Planned Parenthood for information, but they could not make a formal medical referral. The article finished with this statement: "We don't want any drop-outs because of

pregnancy this year. Play it SAFE!!”(45) This provoked a response from Dr. Edward VanDuzer entitled “Unchristian”. VanDuzer attacked students who wanted the benefits of living as an adult while, in his view, exercising no personal responsibility. (46) VanDuzer asserted the college had no business assuming the responsibility for sexual self-control of its students by distributing contraceptives. He attacked *The Stylus* for not wanting to present a balanced viewpoint, and concluded that increased personal freedom without personal responsibility was meaningless. *The Stylus* editorial staff did not dispute VanDuzer’s assertions about personal responsibility, but did state *The Stylus* would not use any specific religion to promote a point of view. What is significant about this exchange is there now appears to be an assumption by the editorial staff of *The Stylus* that religion is an issue they cannot touch, perhaps because they view religion and morality as a process of personal exploration rather than a process of community-building.

In October of 1969, Vietnam Moratorium Day was scheduled for the 15th. A Minute of Silence, Interdenominational Services, and panel discussions on the war were held throughout the day. During this time, letters to the editor of *The Stylus* indicate a level of introspection not often demonstrated by undergraduate students. John Adrience wrote a letter entitled “Acceptance vs. Rejection”, which essentially dealt with assuming responsibility for one’s actions. He takes aim at the student activists who, in his view, demonstrate short sightedness in their zeal to end American involvement in Vietnam. (47) Newman continued to maintain its members by holding talks on topics such as “The Relevance of the Church Today: the Philosophy Club countered with a series entitled “The Relevance of _____ in Modern Society”. (48)

1970 began with a speech by BSG president Walt Stewart to Hillel, he arguing in favor of a “...healthy self-interest”. This self-interest lay in looking beyond personal achievements towards a God whom everyone could devote their energies towards. Stewart urged the members of Hillel to “...give priority to the search for God.” (49) This appeal from the BSG president to a religious club was unprecedented. It signals an appeal to the religious clubs to act as examples for moral behavior, not for others, but for self-preservation. This appeal to self-interest is in sharp contrast to talks that centered on the sect or denomination in question. This speech is remarkable given the fact that the presence of religious organizations on campus had declined: in 1970, there was no mention of the religious clubs in the yearbook. In an ironic twist, the same issue of *The Stylus* announced that Wesley House was the meeting

site for the Brockport Peace Committee, with the discussions centering on values and reforming national priorities.

1971 saw the appearance of another emotional issue, when the October 12th issue of *The Stylus* ran an essay describing one woman's experience getting an illegal abortion. Two things are remarkable about this essay: one, there is no mention of faith or spirituality of any kind, and the second is there was no reaction to this piece appearing in any subsequent issues of *The Stylus*. Brockport did open a Planned Parenthood Center Infirmary on campus that fall. That same year, the Task Force on Values offered twenty fellowships in the amount of \$100 each, dealing with subjects ranging from Governmental Law vs. Personal Conscience and Traditional Religion in Contemporary Society to World Population Problem vs. the Sexual Revolution and Technology and Environment. Announced in the March 9, 1971 issue of *The Stylus*, it gave qualified students an opportunity to research topics as an independent study. The following year saw the creation of a Religious Studies Program, headed by Dr. Lehman. An interdisciplinary major, it consisted of Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, and a host of Social Science electives. It marked the first attempt by the college to offer a study of religion in the curriculum beyond the occasional Philosophy elective. The purpose, as Dr. Lehman described, was not "...to push religion," but to gain an understanding of the impact of religion in society and how religious behavior affects society. (49) Values and faith were now secular topics for study.

By the spring of 1972, a new religious force began to make its presence known on campus. While Newman and Wesley and Inter-Varsity Christian held more traditional services, the so-called "Jesus Freak" movement began to win converts at Brockport. Tracing its origins back to the late 50s, Jesus Freaks were people who searched for a more experiential Christianity, and began to gather in small groups to testify of their conversion experiences. Images from this period are filled with people who were baptized in the Pacific Ocean, and the Rock Opera *Jesus Christ Superstar* seemed to symbolize the movement in popular culture. The Jesus Freak movement at Brockport included members of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, who regarded the meeting as a means of sharing fellowship and spreading Christian teachings at Brockport. Members viewed their facility on King Street not as a church, but as a perpetual tent meeting. Don Riling, the director of the Christian Center in 1972, described the process that brought many to his church as a

simple search for truth, but one that did not free the individual from their responsibilities in society. "It's tough being a Christian. It's tough not being a Christian", he explained in his interview with *The Stylus*. A student, Mary Hayden, told *The Stylus* her desire to have an emotional and intellectual connection to her faith led her to abandon existentialism and embrace Christianity. (50) The author of the article quotes from a *Doonesbury* cartoon comparing the revival of fundamentalist religion and the new search for truth through the use of LSD as essentially the same thing. The process of searching for self has led people to abandon traditional sects and embrace experiential churches with their emphasis on the conversion experience, rather than good works.

In 1972, Hillel was officially recognized as a student organization. For over five years Jewish students struggled to establish a Brockport chapter of the national Jewish student group, and in the fall of 1972, they were granted official status and given offices in the college union building. Hillel had been operating primarily out of the University of Rochester, and the U. of R. still operated as the regional office.

The issue of homosexuality first made its appearance in *The Stylus* in the March, 1973 issues of *The Stylus*. A letter to the editor called for compassion for gay students, prompting a strong letter condemning homosexuals as "sick degenerates". The subsequent firestorm of letters to *The Stylus* was truly remarkable, with responses from the Gay Freedom League to various self-described heterosexuals. The most interesting reply came from Patricia LaRosa, the Vice-Chairman of Newman Council. Newman had allowed the Gay Freedom League to use their facility for meetings, which prompted the flood of letters in the first place. LaRosa admonished the author of the condemnation, Steven Wirkes, by citing scripture supporting the view that Wirkes was not qualified to judge the members of the League for their sexual preference, and that Newman's mission had been to serve the entire community at SUNY Brockport. LaRosa signed the letter "Sincerely, in Christ's Love,...".(51)

In October of 1973, the Jewish community at Brockport experienced two events that gave an enormous boost to their level of activity. The first was the formation of the Brockport Hebrew Culture Group, which was an attempt to involve Jewish students at Brockport with contact with the Jewish community of Rochester. The second event was the Yom Kippur War, which began on October 6, when Syria and Egypt attacked Israel. This solidified the Jewish presence at Brockport, as demonstrated by seminars and meetings held throughout the year focusing on Jewish culture. This intense interest eventually led to the

establishment of a Jewish Studies program, which still exists. Like the Religious Studies minor it is interdisciplinary, drawing on languages, Anthropology, Literature and other disciplines to give students a well-rounded understanding of Jewish culture without religious doctrine. This marks a further inroad in the curriculum at Brockport for religion. Over time, the courses dealing with religion provided a steadier presence than the denominations themselves.

The Watergate scandal provided one of the last solid indicators of how religion had changed on campus. A reader responded to a survey taken by *The Stylus* in November of 1973 when a person identifying himself as a Christian, refused to criticize the President. The implication was that people identifying themselves as Christians were unwilling to oust Nixon from office in the face of overwhelming evidence and public sentiment to do so. The writer reminded *The Stylus* editors that his faith and the faith of his friends had led him to oppose Nixon remaining in office, and he admonishes the editorial staff to avoid making sweeping judgements based upon religious affiliation.

In 1974, there was a movement on campus for recognition of all religious holidays, including Good Friday and Holy Thursday. Proponents of the measure cited their need for religious observance and their firm belief their lost time in class would not affect their grades. Calling themselves "Students for Calendar Change", they approached the administration with their request, which Dr. Crandall, the Vice-President for Instruction and Curriculum, promised to take under advisement.

Since the mid-seventies, there has been a weak religious presence at SUNY Brockport. Most of the religious clubs that had flourished ten years before had disappeared. Newman survived by becoming an actual parish, while Hillel continued to fight for office space at the student union. Religious clubs did not appear in the 1970 issue of the yearbook. Five years later, Hillel and Newman were all that remained of a once-active religious tradition at Brockport. Part of this can be attributed to the changing nature of Brockport itself. As it transformed from a small Teacher's College to a Liberal Arts College catering to a growing number of commuter students, it became increasingly difficult to have active student participation in religious activities. The almost-total absence of announcements in *The Stylus*, and the lack of representation by religious groups is not necessarily an indication of a lack of faith, but a change in the student body which cannot be easily qualified.

In 1948, two religious clubs were on campus, the Newman Club and the Student Christian Fellowship (SCF). By 1955, Newman and SCF had been joined by Wesley Student Fellowship and Kinneret, and by 1960, Canterbury was well-established. In 1965, the Lutheran Club had joined along with the Christian Scientists, and the Bahai Club was established before the end of the decade. By 1975, the religious clubs had staged a small comeback, but it was limited to Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, the Bahai Club and Hillel. In the 1980s, Hillel and the Campus Crusade for Christ were the only student religious organizations listed with the college. A decade later the Alpha Omega Christian Fellowship had replaced the Campus Crusade for Christ as the only Christian group on campus, along with Newman Oratory.

One of the other factors contributing to this decline of religious and spiritual activity on campus is the fact the denominations that were so active in the fifties and sixties experienced drops in membership across the country. As a result, they were forced to combine resources with other denominations in order to survive. Brockport was affected more by the simple fact the student body was increasingly coming from the Rochester area, and as a result, lost potential members to churches in other towns. Many students viewed Brockport as a commuter campus, and were unwilling to go to church at a site that did not seem community-oriented.

The students were shifting away from the traditional, sectarian religion of their parents towards more personal relationships with God. The letters to the editors of *The Stylus* explaining the Jesus Freak movement of the late sixties and early seventies show a hunger for spiritual fulfillment, not a desire to perform good works. Like all evangelists, they focused on the conversion experience as the key to salvation. While Wesley and Newman focussed on helping young men evade the draft and organized Freedom marches, the charismatic sects were using the inward focus of the times to help people find spiritual fulfillment. Many people had turned to philosophy for answers, but they needed something to satisfy their emotional need for comfort, and the charismatic churches gave them what they needed. The questions about religion at Brockport are not easy to answer unless people view the religion that emerged as indicative of the time. Students following the Second World War were involved in building communities that went beyond the traditional sectarian boundaries of the pre-war era. Students continued to identify themselves by their faith, but a strong spirit of ecumenism at Brockport was forging a new community of faith and learning. This spirit of community saw its greatest moments during the Civil

Rights movement, but as the campus and the country focused on the need to build community, there also grew an increasing need for personal explanations to dealing with various issues in life. Concerns over one's place in society, and particularly issues of personal and public morality caused students to look for solutions other than the traditional religious organizations. In short, Brockport's religious orientation turned from community building to soul-searching. Brockport students no longer attended services in large numbers, presumably because the religious clubs no longer met their needs. The fact there is no significant involvement by religious clubs in the Equal Rights Amendment battles of the late 70s or the ongoing battles over abortion is a significant indicator of the weak presence of religion on campus. Since there has been a shift towards becoming a commuter campus, it is safe to assume that many students do not attend church while at school. Individual relationships with God are preventing the reestablishment of a strong religious community at Brockport, not a lack of faith. Those sects, like Catholicism and Judaism, have survived because they provide a strong community for their respective flocks. Ironically, the ecumenical movement may have contributed to the downfall of the Protestant clubs, since after the creation of the Protestant Center there was no place for Protestant students to go and worship with their particular denomination. It is the inability of the Protestant sects to meet the needs of their students that spells the decline of the religious clubs at Brockport.

ENDNOTES

- (1) Kutolowski, John, The Newman Movement at SUNY/Brockport, a Half-Century: 1940-1990, pg. 8
- (2) Ibid, pg. 5
- (3) Michaels, Eugene, editorial, The Stylus, 6 February, 1948, pg. 3
- (4) "Announcements", The Stylus, 14 January, 1949, pg. 3
- (5) "Club News", The Stylus, 15 January, 1950, pg. 2
- (6) "Announcements", The Stylus, 6 October, 1949, pg. 2
- (7) "Announcements", The Stylus, 28 November, 1949, pg. 4
- (8) "Club News", The Stylus, 14 March, 1952, pg. 3
- (9) Ibid, The Stylus, 24 March, 1952, pg. 4
- (10) Ibid, The Stylus, 10 November, 1952, pg. 5
- (11) Ibid, The Stylus, 10 February, 1952, pg. 4
- (12) Ibid, The Stylus, 18 March, 1955, pg. 3
- (13) Ibid, The Stylus, 21 April, 1955, pg. 4
- (14) Ibid, The Stylus, 14 March, 1956, pg. 5
- (15) Ibid, The Stylus, 18 March, 1960, pg. 4
- (16) Ibid, The Stylus, 14 October, 1960, pg. 5
- (17) Ibid, The Stylus, 28 October, 1960, pg. 4
- (18) Ibid, The Stylus, 20 October, 1961, pg. 5
- (19) Ibid, The Stylus, 15 December, 1961, pg. 6
- (20) Ibid, The Stylus, 15 February, 1962, pg. 2
- (21) Ibid, The Stylus, 15 February, 1962, pg. 2
- (22) "Club News", The Stylus, 27 February, 1962, pg. 2
- (23) "Dateline", The Stylus, 9 March, 1962, pg. 2
- (24) Ibid, The Stylus, 16 March, 1962, pg. 2
- (25) "Club News", The Stylus, 23 March, 1962, pg. 3
- (26) Ibid, The Stylus, 28 March, 1962, pg. 2
- (27) Ibid, The Stylus, 28 March, 1962, pg. 2
- (28) Ibid, The Stylus, 25 September, 1962, pg. 2
- (29) "Letters to the Editor", The Stylus, 10 December, 1962, pg. 2
- (30) "Dr. Steele Receives Award", The Stylus, 5 October, 1972, pg. 5
- (31) "Club News", The Stylus, 3 December, 1963, pg. 2
- (32) Ibid, The Stylus, 28 February, 1964, pg. 3
- (33) Ibid, The Stylus, 6 March, 1964, pg. 2
- (34) "Dr. Petry to Speak", The Stylus, 13 March, 1964, pg. 2
- (35) "Dr. Gilbert Appointed to Philosophy Department", The Stylus, 14 January, 1966, pg. 2
- (36) "Discussion on Religion and the Playboy Philosophy", The Stylus, 15 September, 1965, pg. 2
- (37) "International Philosophy Year a Failure", The Stylus, 1 May, 1967, pg. 1
- (38) "Resistance-Conscience", The Stylus, 15 March, 1968, pg. 2
- (39) Schraeder, Edward, "Vietnam: A Case of Cultural Values", The Stylus, 15 March, 1968, pg. 2
- (40) Kunstler, James Howard, "The People vs. the Pigs", The Stylus, 27 September, 1968, pg. 2
- (41) Silverman, Steven, "Leary Visits Brockport", The Stylus, 15 October, 1968, pg. 1
- (42) Adriance, John, "Letters to the Editor", The Stylus, 8 November, 1968, pg. 2
- (43) "Newman Hosts Forum", The Stylus, 15 October, 1968, pg. 5
- (44) VanDuzer, Edward, "Unchristian", The Stylus, 22 October, 1968, pg. 5
- (45) Adriance, John, "Acceptance vs. Rejection", The Stylus, 15 October, 1968, pg. 8
- (46) "Club News", The Stylus, 15 October, 1968, pg. 2
- (47) "Text of Address by BSG President Stewart Walter", The Stylus, 15 September, 1970, pg. 1
- (48) "Religious Studies Program Announced" The Stylus, 25 September, 1972, pg. 6
- (49) "A Basic Movement of Joy Branches Out... Into What?" The Stylus, 20 March, 1972, pg. 7
- (50) "Letters to the Editor", The Stylus, 5-26 March, 1973
- (51) Ibid, The Stylus, 8 November, 1973, pg. 12

BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY

During the course of my research I read through old issues of *The Stylus* and the yearbook in an effort to understand how religious expression at the campus evolved. I also read John Kutolowski's paper on the Newman organization, The Newman Movement at SUNY/Brockport, 1940-1990, as well as Wayne Dedman's Cherishing This Heritage. The newspaper proved to be an absolute gold mine of primary source material, since it reflected the voice of the student, something that seemed to be noticeably absent from Cherishing this Heritage.

What was most surprising was the amount of information available from the paper, and the sophisticated writing that came from dozens of undergraduate writers. What was equally unexpected were the themes of ecumenism vs. identity, self vs. community that emerged from the research. I originally had thoughts of writing an analysis of the religious clubs alone, but the strong presence of the philosophy club and the various social events led me to expand this to include all explorations of conscience. This led me to examine the psychological aspect of how student thinking changed over the course of the first twenty-five years of Brockport's history. What is very clear is the student focus shifted from building a community of faith at Brockport towards the creation of a site where individuals studied and worked together. Religion was considered a personal matter, not a matter for the college community.

Yearbooks were of minimal value, except to provide a window into the number of groups on campus. I found it hard to believe that Brockport's active religious population was limited to the handful of individuals who posed in the photographs.